

IV. Goals and Content Standards

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A French festival—complete with music, dancing, food, and a “street celebration” in the school cafeteria—culminates a year’s worth of exposure to French language and culture for students at one of the State’s elementary schools. All ages of students, from kindergartners to sixth-graders, participate to varying degrees in the introductory language program.

As students begin studying foreign languages at younger ages, designing programs that take into account the varying needs and developmental stages of learners at different grade levels becomes increasingly important. Sequential and articulated programs are essential. The study of a foreign language should be continuous and cumulative, with a smooth and logical progression of skills from one school year to the next. Concepts and topics are recycled and expanded from year to year as tasks become more challenging and complex.

At all levels of foreign language education, instruction should be based on a sequential, articulated program of study. The goals and standards for foreign language learning are

- Communication—to communicate in languages other than English;
- Cultures—to gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures;
- Connections—to connect with other disciplines and acquire information;
- Comparisons—to develop insight into the nature of language and culture; and
- Communities—to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world.

Foreign language study improves SAT scores

“In 1992, the College Board reported that students who averaged four or more years of foreign language study scored higher on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than those who had studied four or more years in any other subject area.”

Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language? (ERIC Parent Brochure).

Foreign language study and problem solving

“Children who receive second language instruction are more creative and better at solving complex problems.”

Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?

Benchmark stages

These standards are assessed at three benchmark stages. The terms *beginning*, *developing*, and *expanding* are used to designate these stages of language development (*Nebraska Foreign Language Frameworks*, 1996). The three terms emphasize the fact that language is a complex system and that language skills are developed over a long period of time.

- A student at a *beginning* level is learning basic skills regardless of his or her grade level.
- A student at the *developing* level will be able to use short phrases and simple sentences but will still not be considered proficient or fluent in a foreign language with regard to any of the five goals.
- A student at the *expanding* level, having benefited from a complete K–12 language experience, will be able to participate in the target language in analytical and higher-level tasks similar to those in other core and elective subjects.

Each benchmark stage will incorporate and expand the skills developed in the previous stage.

A student at a beginning level will be able to use words and phrases but will not be considered proficient or fluent in the target language with regard to any of the five goals. However, a student benefiting from a K–12 language experience will be at the expanding level and able to participate in the target language in analytical and higher-level tasks similar to those in his or her other core and elective subjects.

The need for assessment and evaluation

Assessment of student progress at the end of each benchmark stage is necessary both to evaluate program quality and to ensure the smooth transition of students from one stage to another. Student progress is measured by a combination of achievement testing (traditional testing that measures knowledge of a specific body of material taught in the classroom) and proficiency testing (open-ended testing that gauges the ability to function in real-life situations). Interviews with students, videotapes, checklists, and portfolios are some of the useful methods for determining student proficiency.

Increasing career possibilities

“Students of foreign languages have access to a greater number of career possibilities and develop a deeper understanding of their own and other cultures.”

Why, How and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?

A global perspective

“Americans fluent in other languages enhance our economic competitiveness abroad, improve global communication, and maintain our political and security interests.”

Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?

An effective foreign language program takes into account the fact that individuals develop language proficiency at different rates. A predetermined set of assessment standards cannot always be met within the confines of the school year. Foreign language assessment is further complicated when students enter the beginning stage of language study at different grade levels. Therefore, benchmark assessments give school districts the flexibility to evaluate student progress within each stage.

The development of benchmark assessments will follow the publication of the *South Carolina Foreign Language Curriculum Standards*.

Standards for foreign language learning

In 1993, a coalition of four major language organizations—the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP)—received funding to develop standards for foreign language education, grades K–12.

An eleven-member task force, representing a variety of language levels of instruction, program models, and geographic regions, was appointed to undertake the task of defining content standards—what students should know and be able to do—in foreign language education. At each stage of development, the task force shared its work with the broader profession and the public at large. The resulting document, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, represents an unprecedented consensus among educators, business leaders, government, and the community on the definition and role of foreign language instruction in American education.

While *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* suggests the types of curricular experiences needed to enable students to achieve the standards and supports the ideal of extended sequences of study that begin in the elementary grades and continue through high school and beyond, it does not describe specific course content or recommended sequence of study. The document must be used in conjunction with state and local standards and curriculum frameworks to determine the best approaches and reasonable expectations for the students in individual districts and schools.

For a list of all state standards, see pages 51 and 67.

The key to successful communication

To study another language and culture gives one the powerful key to successful communication: “knowing how, when, and why, to say what to whom.”

Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century, 29.

Standards for classical language learning

Standards for Classical Language Learning applies the five goals of communication to a context appropriate for Latin and Greek.

The standards for classical language learning are organized within the five goal areas that make up classical language education:

- Communication,
- Culture,
- Connections,
- Comparisons, and
- Communities.

Each goal area contains two content standards. These standards describe the knowledge and abilities students should acquire.

Under each goal are standards for *beginning*, *developing*, and *expanding* stages. The standards are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Developing and expanding students are expected to exhibit the standards of the lower stages as well as the standards of their own stage.

Personal testimony

“I value the Latin courses which I took in high school for several reasons: the discipline it taught me; the historical context—it was a history and culture lesson as well as a lesson in language; and, most important to me, is the knowledge which I gained in the areas of vocabulary and grammatical development. I feel the study of Latin is an important part of a sophisticated and intelligent person’s education.”—Ben Rast, senior vice president for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter in Columbia, South Carolina.